

on in Burma. I appreciate his remarks today in that regard.

AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Mr. REID. Mr. President, my friend the Republican leader can't see the forest for the trees when it comes to health care. I understand that. He has given many speeches denigrating ObamaCare.

The facts are that more people are getting access to health care today under the Affordable Care Act than ever before. The share without insurance is now at an alltime low.

The cost growth in health care has never been lower than it has been since ObamaCare kicked in. I was telling one of my Senator friends yesterday that when I went home during the Memorial Day recess, I had two people come to me. I know that is not a great sampling, but it shows how impactful the legislation has been. Both of them had children with significant challenges, physical and mental. These young men and women now have the ability to get health care. They cannot be denied insurance because of their preexisting disability. This law that was passed not only applies to people with disabilities about which I have just spoken, but it applies to people with disabilities such as diabetes. Prior to ObamaCare, women could be charged more for their health care. So people are extremely satisfied with health care.

The Supreme Court should understand that about 7 million people who are happy with their health care and who are receiving subsidies for their insurance to take care of themselves would lose that. They would lose those subsidies. It would be a devastating blow to 7 million people, as well as to the economy. Also, those people who don't need subsidies benefit significantly. The people who have had increased premiums—my friend was very selective in whom he chose, because the people having increases are very minimal. I will have more to say about that at some subsequent time in the near future.

ObamaCare is working. Reports out this week show that all the targets have been met as to people who have purchased insurance and they are paying their premiums. So I think we should try to improve the law rather than my Republican friends continually trying to talk about the failures that don't exist.

SEQUESTRATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, every Senator wants to keep America safe, and that is why every Senator should be concerned about a particular threat to our national security. This threat to our national security is called sequestration. Sequestration puts in place drastic cuts to all funding, defense and nondefense.

The Defense authorization bill that is before us today doesn't fix that—and

that is a gross understatement. We should not start spending until we develop a bipartisan budget that does. That is the only responsible way to protect both our national security and America's middle class.

Sequestration results from what happened 4 years ago with another threat of a government shutdown because the Republicans couldn't get their financial house in order.

The Budget Control Act of 2011 passed. That act included a number of significant spending cuts and established a supercommittee led by Senator MURRAY and Congressman HENSARLING from Texas to produce a balanced, bipartisan agreement for additional deficit reduction. Unfortunately, Republicans could never agree. There was a lot of this: Yes, we are almost there, we are almost there. But they could never pull the trigger and agree. There was a refusal to close a single tax loophole to reduce the deficit; not a single one could they agree on.

So the supercommittee failed to reach an agreement, and the Budget Control Act triggered deep, automatic cuts.

Sequestration was never intended to happen. The point was to threaten cuts so deep and so stupid that Congress would never let them happen. But never put that beyond this Republican group over the last 10 years and who are still here in Congress. They allowed this stupid thing to happen. The cuts affected both defense and nondefense programs so everyone would feel compelled to move it, because the cuts were equal.

Unfortunately, what was stupid in 2011 is now official Republican policy. Congressional Republicans incorporated sequestration into their recent budget resolution. That resolution leaves sequestration cuts in place in parts of the budget that affect the middle class, and it also directly threatens national security. There are many examples of this.

How does it affect the middle class? The list is really endless. It cuts investments in roads, bridges, rail, and transit. That costs jobs—lots and lots of jobs, hundreds of thousands of jobs. It puts travelers at risk, and it weakens our economy.

Sequestration cuts education. That means fewer children with a shot at going to school. If they can't do that, they don't have a shot at success. It means fewer Americans who can afford college. That is the way it is. It means less economic opportunity for millions of Americans.

Sequestration cuts research. That means fewer chances to beat cancer, heart disease, and Alzheimer's. As a result of sequestration, the National Institutes of Health, the premier medical research institution in the world, was whacked by sequestration to the tune of \$1.6 billion. They have never, ever gotten that money back. It stopped the finalization work done on the universal flu vaccine. The list is endless as to

what they can't do because of that money being lost.

While sequestration is a dagger pointed at the middle class, it also represents a threat to our society in many different ways. It means fewer opportunities for American businesses and consumers to benefit from cutting edge innovations.

Sequestration threatens cuts to the FBI, the Federal Bureau of Investigation. It means fewer FBI resources devoted to terrorists and hunting them down.

Sequestration threatens cuts for the Transportation Security Administration, which helps protect us from another 9/11.

Sequestration threatens cuts for fusion centers, which have worked so well—these centers help law enforcement officials work together—and for the Coast Guard and border security officials who protect Americans from dangers from abroad.

These are cuts that are in place right now.

The bill before us is designed to provide an end run around sequestration for the Department of Defense by exploiting a provision that exempts from spending caps what is called the overseas contingency operations, or OCO. We all know that OCO was put in the budget many years ago, and it was set there so we would have the money to fight wars. It is always very hard to determine how much wars are going to cost. We know that because we had to borrow almost \$2 trillion for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, especially in Iraq.

But the OCO gimmick does not solve the problem of sequestration, and that is true. I am disappointed that even Senators who long have had a reputation for fiscal honesty, such as the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, my friend, are turning a blind eye to the OCO gimmick. There has not been a word from people who have had a reputation for fiscal honesty—not a word—about this gimmick.

The Department of Defense says it won't work. It is just a 1-year gimmick, and that will make it impossible for military leaders to prepare for threats we face in the future.

The OCO gimmick does nothing for agencies that protect us here at home, such as, as I have indicated, the FBI and even the Department of Homeland Security. That leaves all Americans vulnerable to attacks if they don't get the resources they need.

So until we reach a balanced, bipartisan agreement on the budget—an agreement that protects both national security and the middle class—not a single spending bill will become law. If any bill reaches the President, he will veto it. He has said so publicly many times. He should. It is critical for the middle class, and it is the only way to be fiscally responsible. We ought to budget before we spend.

Days after letting critical national security tools expire on their watch,

Republicans are showing yet another way they can't govern. Now we are wasting time on a bill that has no chance of becoming law—no chance. No troops will be helped by a bill that can't be signed into law by the President. Our military needs all the help they can get. They deserve it.

If Republicans want to join us in supporting our troops, they should start taking their responsibility to govern seriously and work with us on a Defense bill that can actually become law to help those in our Armed Forces.

Let's be straight. At the moment, we don't have a budget.

Without the vote of a single Democrat, Republicans approved a non-binding resolution with their own wish list. It means nothing. The budget means nothing. There was a lot of back-slapping here: Oh, it is a great budget; we are going to balance the budget. But everyone knows that is just a farce.

Until both parties join together, the government does not have a budget to actually guide decisionmaking. We need one.

This is not rocket science. After all, budgeting for the Federal Government is not all that different than budgeting for a family. If two spouses are trying to resolve differences over their own budget, would it be responsible for one spouse to go out and buy a new car on credit? We all know the answer to that—no. It is the same here in Washington. Shouldn't we agree on a budget first and spend later? That is not asking too much, I don't believe.

We don't need political theater and meaningless votes on bills that are going nowhere. We don't need another manufactured crisis. We just need to sit down, get real, and fix sequestration in a way that protects both national security and the middle class. They go together.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2016

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 1735, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1735) to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2016 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Pending:

McCain amendment No. 1463, in the nature of a substitute.

McCain amendment No. 1456 (to amendment No. 1463), to require additional information supporting long-range plans for construction of naval vessels.

Reed amendment No. 1521 (to amendment No. 1463), to limit the availability of amounts authorized to be appropriated for overseas contingency operations pending relief from the spending limits under the Budget Control Act of 2011.

Portman amendment No. 1522 (to amendment No. 1463), to provide additional amounts for procurement and for research, development, test, and evaluation for Stryker Lethality Upgrades, and to provide an offset.

Reed (for Bennet) amendment No. 1540 (to amendment No. 1463), to require the Comptroller General of the United States to brief and submit a report to Congress on the administration and oversight by the Department of Veterans Affairs of contracts for the design and construction of major medical facility projects.

Cornyn amendment No. 1486 (to amendment No. 1463), to require reporting on energy security issues involving Europe and the Russian Federation, and to express the sense of Congress regarding ways the United States could help vulnerable allies and partners with energy security.

Reed (for Shaheen) amendment No. 1494 (to amendment No. 1463), to revise the definition of spouse for purposes of veterans benefits in recognition of new State definitions of spouse.

Tillis amendment No. 1506 (to amendment No. 1463), to provide for the stationing of C-130 H aircraft avionics previously modified by the Avionics Modernization Program (AMP) in support of daily training and contingency requirements for Airborne and Special Operations Forces.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 30 minutes equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, it is my understanding that there will be a vote at 10:15 a.m.; is that correct?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will be 30 minutes of debate prior to the vote.

Mr. MCCAIN. I thank the Chair.

Mr. President, I just listened to the words of the Senate minority leader concerning his views on an authorization bill—not an appropriations bill, not a funding bill but an authorization bill. I would hope the minority leader and, frankly, my colleague and friend, Senator REID, would pay attention to what is going on in the world today.

I refer to the Washington Post this morning and an article entitled “Deadly fighting tests truce in Ukraine.”

As many of us predicted, Vladimir Putin will continue his aggression and dismemberment of the European nation for the first time in 70 years.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the article entitled “Deadly fighting tests truce in Ukraine” be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Washington Post, June 4, 2015]

DEADLY FIGHTING TESTS TRUCE IN UKRAINE

(By Karoun Demirjian)

MOSCOW.—Continued skirmishes between pro-Russian rebels and government forces in eastern Ukraine escalated Wednesday into the first major battle in months, leaving at least 18 dead and further threatening a ten-

uous cease-fire agreement signed in February.

Both sides traded accusations about who had started the fighting in Marinka, a suburb of Donetsk on the government-held side of the cease-fire line. Separatists reported 15 dead, and three Ukrainian soldiers were killed, according to a Facebook post by Yuriy Biryukov, an adviser to Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko.

“They tried to move forward. The Ukrainian military are repelling all attacks, and the situation is under control,” Col. Andriy Lysenko, a spokesman for Ukraine’s National Security and Defense Council, said at a news conference Wednesday in Kiev. “Marinka and Krasnohorivka are under our control.”

But the head of the separatists’ militia said they were only defending themselves against an assault by the pro-Kiev forces.

“Trying to announce that we are storming Marinka—this is a provocation by Kiev,” said Vladimir Kononov, the militias’ top defense official. “We already are in Marinka.”

Since February, top diplomats from the United States and Europe have participated in several rounds of shuttle diplomacy aimed at settling the conflict and persuading the rebels and the government to fully implement the peace agreement signed in Minsk, Belarus.

Last month, U.S. Secretary of State John F. Kerry and Assistant Secretary of State Victoria Nuland made back-to-back trips to Russia, urging that country’s leaders to use their influence over the separatists in eastern Ukraine to push them to parley with Kiev. Groups from both sides were supposed to conclude an opening round of talks in Ukraine this week to address various points of contention.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk accused Russia on Wednesday of intentionally undermining the peace process and ordering pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine “to start a military operation.”

The surge in violence also comes as Western nations are gearing up for this weekend’s Group of Seven summit in Germany—an assembly of nations from which Russia was ousted when it annexed Crimea last year.

That annexation happened after the upper house of the Russian parliament met in an emergency session to give President Vladimir Putin the authority to send troops abroad.

On Wednesday, the speaker of the upper house told lawmakers that there may be cause to hold a similar emergency session soon but did not give a specific reason for the warning.

Mr. MCCAIN. Perhaps the minority leader and others have missed this article: “Syria likely used chlorine gas in recent bombing raids, rights group says.”

A prominent human rights group accused the Syrian government Wednesday of using toxic chemicals during a recent surge in attacks involving barrel bombs on rebel-held areas in northern Syria.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that this article be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[From the Washington Post, June 4, 2015]

SYRIA LIKELY USED CHLORINE GAS IN RECENT BOMBING RAIDS, RIGHTS GROUP SAYS

(By Hugh Naylor)

BEIRUT.—A prominent human rights group accused the Syrian government Wednesday of using toxic chemicals during a recent